

Joke Book by **abeth-zuppa**

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Summary: Mike attempts to teach Eleven about the art of making jokes.

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"Hey El, I brought you some stuff".

Mike walked down the basement stairs, noting El in her usual spot curled up inside the blanket fort. He carried some books and a plate of food to her.

"I got you some Eggos and juice. I hope that's okay".

El snatched the waffles off of the plate, eating them ravenously. Mike tried to avoid staring at her while she ate, but it was really hard when she was eating like a wild animal and crumbs were falling all over the blankets. She even made some sort of growling noise as she feasted on the buttery waffles. When she had finished off the waffles, she sipped from the box of apple juice that Mike had also provided after he showed her how to put the straw in.

Mike took the other juice box and sipped from it slowly.

"Hey, I also brought some books, so that you don't get bored down here".

Eleven picked up the small pile of books that Mike had laid down next to him. She flipped through, the rustling of the pages breaking the silence in the basement. She had a look of wonder on her face.

"Can you read?"

She shook her head. As Mike rubbed his forehead in mild frustration over his stupidity.

She barely talks, she probably can't read..., he thought to himself.

El's attention gravitated towards a brightly colored book with purple and green letters on a white background. She picked it up and gave it to Mike.

"El, this is a joke book".

He pointed to the smiling and laughing faces on the cover, trying to display to her what it was. It was a book that his mom bought for him at a garage sale when he was probably five years old. The jokes in it were definitely innocent compared to the ones he had been exposed to recently from Dustin, Lucas, and Will.

"Joke?"

Mike turned to look at El. Her huge brown eyes portrayed a sense of confusion.

Has she never heard of a joke? He wondered.

"Yeah, it's a...funny story. It makes people laugh and feel happy".

"Funny?"

"Yeah, you know, something that makes you laugh, like this".

He opened his mouth and let out a tiny laugh, audible enough for El but quiet enough that it wouldn't attract attention from upstairs. El still seemed really puzzled.

"Here, you try! Just open your mouth and make that same sound!", Mike encouraged.

El hesitated, but she opened her mouth. She let out a small squeak which sounded nothing like the laugh that Mike had demonstrated, but it was definitely something.

"Umm, okay, that's a good start. Here, let's see. I'll try telling you a joke".

He flipped through the brightly-colored book, attempting to find a joke that El would be able to comprehend and enjoy.

"Okay, I've got one. Ready for this, El?"

El nodded her head.

"Okay. How do you make a tissue dance?"

Unsurprisingly, Mike noted that El was confused.

"How...tissue dance?"

"Not quite. You say, um, I don't know".

"Don't know?"

Mike sighed.

"Yeah, when I say the joke, you ask 'I don't know'. Do you understand?"

"Understand", El said, shaking her head in agreement.

"Okay. How do you make a tissue dance?"

"....I don't know?"

"You put a little boogie in it!"

Mike started to snicker a little. Even if that joke was one his dad told him as a kid and found in every joke book, it was still pretty damn funny. He glanced at El, seeing if she was having the same reaction as he was.

El was sitting there on the blanket, her face displaying that she was lost in thought.

"El? Did you get it?"

She shook her head.

"A good comedian is not supposed to explain the joke, but I'll tell you anyway. So, a tissue is used to wipe your nose. Got that?"

El nodded.

"And the stuff that you put into the tissue from your nose is called snot or boogies. So, that's how you make a tissue dance....you didn't understand any of that, did you?"

El gave Mike a sad look. She seemed like she wanted to understand,

but it was just too much information.

"Okay, I've got another one. This one gets my baby sister Holly to laugh every time".

He cleared his throat. This one was gonna get her to laugh for sure.

"Knock-knock".

El squinted her eyes.

"I don't know".

Oh no.

"Hey El, can you say 'Who's there?'"

"Mm-hm. Who's there?"

"Good, now say that after I say 'knock-knock'".

El nodded.

"Knock-knock".

"Who's there?"

"Boo".

"Who's there?"

Mike scratched the top of his head, but he kept a steady stream of patience.

"Okay El, you should say 'boo who?' after saying 'Who's there?', got it?"

"Mm-hm".

"Knock-knock".

"Who's there boo who?"

Mike was astonished. His three year old sister understood these sorts of jokes. Sure, it had taken a lot of practice of teaching her how to say the words, but she knew how they worked. It was fascinating to him how Eleven, a girl his age, struggled to understand the basic knock-knock joke. But whatever, he wanted to help her and put a smile on her face. He smiled a little bit as he took another shot at this.

"El, I say 'knock-knock' and you respond with 'who's there?', alright?"

The girl nodded in agreement.

"Okay. Knock-knock".

"Who's there?"

"Good, now when I say 'boo', you say 'boo who'? Understand?"

Again, Eleven bobbed her head up and down.

"Alright, let's try that part. Boo!"

"Boo who?"

"You got it, El! Now, let's try putting it together".

"Together?"

"Yeah, so that it makes one joke. Ready?"

Eleven nodded and focused on Mike's face. She concentrated on what she was supposed to say from what Mike had told her.

"Knock-knock".

"Who's there?"

"Boo".

"Boo who?"

"Don't cry, it's just a joke".

Mike smiled, pleased that the joke had went well. It took a few minutes of waiting, but Eleven's eyes shone as she finally processed the joke. A huge grin covered her face and a sound that seemed like a mix between a cough and a squeal rose up from her. She was laughing.

At the sight and sound of her laughing, Mike's face lit up with joy. The last time he had received this much of a reaction to anything was probably when he played peek-a-boo with Holly when she was really small. He couldn't help but laugh as well.

The two kept giggling for a few minutes until their stomachs hurt when Eleven reached up to her eye, brushing away tears.

"Sad".

Mike took the hand that she had wiped the tears away with.

"No, El. Those are happy tears. That's what happens when you laugh hard like that".

Her face beamed.

"Funny".

"Huh?"

"Mike funny".

He scratched the back of his head, a slight blush tinging his cheeks.

"Aww hell. Just doing my best".

From up the stairs, Mrs. Wheeler called down to the basement.

"Mike, it's time for bed!"

"Okay Mom!" he responded.

He turned to Eleven, whispering.

"Get some sleep. I'll be back in the morning".

As he gathered up the dishes and books, he noted how intensely El was staring at the joke book

"You can keep it down here if you want", he told her.

She picked up the book and put it in a safe place as she got herself ready for bed.

"Good night, El".

"Good night, Mike".

He headed up the stairs to his room with one last check on El. When he was out of sight, Eleven pulled the joke book from its spot and held it close to the nightlight. She pointed to the laughing faces on the cover, mimicking their expressions. She giggled a tiny bit as she made faces.

"Funny. Happy", she whispered before drifting off to sleep, joke book in hand.